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September 20, 1961

Dr. G.E.W. Wolstenholme
The Ciba Foundation
41 Portland Place
London, W. 1, England

Dear Dr. Wolstenholme:

To yours of August 30.

I believe that the Ciba Foundation could very profitably sponsor a symposium on extraterrestrial life. This would have two parts - the detection of life elsewhere within the solar system by proximate investigation; and communication with intelligent life elsewhere in the galaxy. I believe that it would also be most fruitful if, contrary to some past experiences, the symposium did not entirely confine itself to scientific questions, but also dealt with some of the political, legal and social issues.

While there would be considerable virtue to having such a conference even without Russian participation perhaps one of its greatest potential values would be to provide a non-political forum at which there could be complete international representation. However, there are reasons to suspect that the Russians will be rather suspicious of such a venture, and it may take some careful work and planning to allay that suspicion. I would suggest, therefore, that your first measures would be to make a similar inquiry of some of our Russian colleagues to see if it would be possible to elicit some active interest on their part. If so it might be desirable or even necessary to narrow the scope of the discussion somewhat from the range of fields that I have mentioned since some of these may be too closely connected with tense political questions. If a Russian interest cannot be promptly and decisively engaged, then we might proceed without on this broader basis.

I do not feel that it would be particularly profitable for Ciba to undertake a conference on the Man In Space aspects of space medicine since this problem is so thoroughly gone into at frequent intervals elsewhere.

There may be some discussions of parts of the topic in other organizations, but I do not know of any that would attempt the breadth that I suggest here.

It would be of real advantage to elicit the interest of some of our outstanding colleagues in various aspects of the question regardless of whether they have previously contributed to the subject.

Dr. G.E. W. Wolstenholme

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If these proposals are agreeable to you and a more definite plan seems worth working out, I will be very happy to offer any support that I can for the success of the venture.

I trust you will have had an interesting, and I hope not too exhausting trip.

With best regards,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics